

Poison & Wine by TheLostSister

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Summary:

April, 1984. Chicago. Joyce, Hopper, and Will set out to meet with a new doctor to help with Will's symptoms. Joyce and Hopper spend a few nights alone in the hot tub and pool and take things a little too far.

Poison & Wine

Spring Break, 1984

Immediately after Will came back home, Hopper and Joyce spent a lot of time together. It happened naturally as they went through the process of signing all the legal paperwork and confidentiality agreements.

But as the winter wore on, Hopper was MIA more often, and Joyce figured they would just go back to how their relationship was before Will had gone missing- two old friends who would politely engage in small talk if they happened to see each other out and about, but nothing more.

Joyce had no idea what sort of secret Hopper had been hiding from her and everyone else. He thought about telling her over and over again, but he didn't want to put her in any danger. Just like he would, he knew she would protect El at all costs, so putting her in a position where she may have to, wasn't worth it just so that he would have someone else to talk to. It was selfish, and he knew it, so he promised himself he would keep El a secret until it was safer for everyone.

Late January and into February, Will began having more trouble sleeping, and when he was awake, he had occasional odd episodes too. Enough that while Will did his best to hide them, Joyce noticed and so did a few of his teachers. After some phone calls, she found out about a facility in Chicago who sounded like they may actually be able to help. Of course, Will wouldn't be able to fully detail what was happening, but hopefully with a story close enough to the truth, the doctors would be able to provide them with some sort of promising treatment.

Joyce began working overtime and saving every penny she could to afford to bring Will there for a two day and night study. It was going to take a couple of months to save up, but she hoped by the beginning of April when Will's school went on Spring Break, she would have enough money for the visit.

As Will would be staying at the facility for two nights, she was going to have to make the 3 hour drive back and forth each day since she wasn't going to have enough money for her own accommodations by then. Though the idea of leaving him somewhere 3 hours away was completely horrifying, she didn't want to postpone his treatment any longer, and if this could help him even just a little, it would be worth the temporary stress on her.

It was early March when Hopper began noticing Joyce's car at Melvald's at unusual hours, certainly longer than her usual 8.5 hour shift. It was often enough that he started dropping in more for cigarettes, a snack, the newspaper...just any excuse to come in and check on her without prying.

After one particularly horrible night at the Byers' house, Hopper had stopped in for a pack of cigarettes on his way into work the next morning, and Joyce finally broke down and explained everything that was going on. The night before, she'd woken up in the middle of the night to a colder than usual house. She got up and found the front door open and Will was gone. A few panicked moments later, she found him standing outside in the back yard with no recollection of how he got there. Things seemed to be getting worse and she still needed a few more weeks to scrape together the rest of the money. The thought of what might happen before she did was almost paralyzing for her.

Once Hopper found out what had been going on, it was like a huge weight was lifted from her shoulders. Joyce finally had someone to talk to about everything, someone who she didn't have to hide anything from because he truly understood her concerns. Hop's visits to the store and her house picked up their frequency again, and they spoke to each other nearly every day over the next month, settling back into a comfortable friendship after those few months apart at the beginning of the year.

The week before the visit, Hopper realized Joyce's plans to either drive back to Hawkins each night or sleep in her car overnight while Will spent the night.

"Joyce..." Hopper immediately said, shaking his head at her plan.

"I know, but I really can't wait any longer to do this," she told him, giving him a look that said there would be no compromising.

"Fine, but you are not sleeping in your car overnight in Chicago."

"I'll be fine. I'm sure there will be some sort of security or something in the parking lot. And if not, I can always drive back here," Joyce excused. Hopper knew the actual likelihood of Joyce leaving Will that far away was slim to none.

He also didn't like the idea of Joyce having go through any of this on her own either. She was tough as hell, but she didn't ask for any of this to happen to her child, and he knew how hard it was for Joyce to ask for any sort of help. So he did what any good friend would do and invited himself along, with the added incentive of booking a hotel room for them for the duration of the stay.

"No, I can't let you do that," Joyce immediately told him.

"Oh, come on, it'll be like a mini vacation," Hopper offered. "And besides, the hotel is already booked so..."

Joyce fired another look at him but didn't further protest; this was the nicest thing anyone had done for her in years.

"Honestly I should probably be there, you know, in case anything weird comes up when they look into Will's history." Hopper tried his best to make it sound like it was a necessity unrelated to her, knowing that she hated accepting anything that may be considered as a handout. "When's the last time you took a vacation anyway?"

A vacation? Joyce wondered. Literally not since she was child. Even her and Lonnie's honeymoon consisted of just two night stay at the Super 8 in Indianapolis.

As the day of the trip got closer, Joyce's guilt over Hopper volunteering to spend not only his money on her, but to also take time off work to spend an entire three weekdays out of town with them, slowly eased into major relief. Hopper volunteered to do the driving and had even booked an extra night at the hotel so that they wouldn't have to get up extremely early in the morning to make it

there. He reminded Will and Joyce to pack their bathing suits because the hotel they were staying at also had an indoor pool and hot tub. It wasn't anything super fancy, but it was a little classier than your average Motel 6. He wished he could bring El with, knowing that a trip like that would certainly perk her up, but for obvious reasons, he couldn't.

Finally, the day came, and Hopper anxiously made sure El was all set with all the food she would need and told her that he would try to check in on her if it was safe to do so. She didn't really seem too devastated to be left home alone, especially since she was left with two whole boxes of Eggos for just three days.

At Joyce's, they loaded up their vehicle with overnight bags and drove 3 hours north to Chicago. About 2 minutes after making it to their hotel room, Will was already begging to go down to the pool. Joyce couldn't bring herself to make him wait since this would be Will's only night there with them to enjoy it. He changed into his bathing suit, and Hopper did too.

"Aren't you going to swim too?" Will asked, noticing that his mom was not moving to change her clothes.

"Oh, no honey, not tonight."

"Come on, mom. Please?" Will begged.

"Yeah, come on Joyce," Hop added with a grin.

Joyce was not in the mood for swimming, or really anything, with how high her anxiety was thinking about the next few days.

Hopper reached for her forearm. "It might help to get your mind off things for a little while," he added softly to her.

"Alright, yeah," she took a breath and nodded.

Hopper was pleased to see that it didn't take any more convincing as Joyce rummaged through her luggage bag for her bathing suit and slipped into the bathroom to change. Even though she hadn't worn it in several years, she was surprised to find that it still fit well. Maybe even better than it would have a month ago. Working and worrying

so much had left her with little appetite lately.

Though it was just a modest black one piece, she still felt extremely exposed standing in the bathroom in just a bathing suit. The guys had it so much easier, just throw on a shirt and they were fully dressed. She couldn't exactly do the same, so she decided to at least put her pants back on for the walk down to the pool room.

When Joyce stepped out of the bathroom, Hopper tried his best not to stare, especially here in front of her kid. But damn, when she bent over slightly to pick up their room key off the side table, she made it hard not to at least steal just a quick glance in her direction. It'd been many, many years since he'd seen Joyce in anything less than a t-shirt and pants, and god, how she still looked amazing.

They reached the pool room, and the humidity in the room made it feel like the dead of summer inside, even though it was just barely early spring.

Will and Hopper undressed, and Will jumped into the pool, while Hopper headed for the hot tub. Joyce pulled her hair up into a quick ponytail and gathered the courage to undress. She laid her pants on a chair next to Hopper and Will's discarded shirts and quickly made her way over to the hot tub. When she climbed down the steps, Hopper found himself unable to look away. With her hair pulled up into a ponytail, she looked not one day older than she had when they graduated high school together. How was that even possible.

Joyce sank down into the water across from him and settled in directly in front one of the jets with a content sigh.

"Hop, thank you...for all of this," Joyce said, her voice no louder than it had to be to just barely hear her over the whirling sound of the jets.

"Yeah, of course. It's no problem," he answered honestly.

"It's just...I'm sure you had better plans for your PTO."

What could be better than this? He wondered to himself.

"Eh, not really. You'd probably be shocked to know how dull my life

is these days,” he laughed, assuming it was no secret that since Christmas, no one really saw him from the time that he clocked out on Friday until Monday morning. He wasn’t down at the Hideaway playing the usual game of poker or pool. Hell, outside of the Hawkins Police Station, Melvald’s, and the Byers’ house, he barely existed in the town since bringing El home. He felt guilty enough about all the time she had to spend alone during the work week, so he made a point of not spending any unnecessary time away on the nights and weekends. The idea of leaving her for these 3 days was a little worrisome, but he knew she would be fine. The kid obviously knew how to take care of herself, and he trusted her.

“Yeah, sure,” Joyce scoffed with a smile.

She knew Hop’s reputation; he didn’t have to spend a single night alone if he didn’t want to.

Although, since Will’s disappearance, the only rumors she really heard about him were of his relationship with *her*. None of them being true of course, but people talk, and in all fairness, it wasn’t unusual for someone to interrupt one of their quiet conversations with each other at Melvald’s, so she could see why the stories continued to circulate throughout the town.

When Joyce saw that Hopper seemed to be telling the truth, she said, “Well boring can be good sometimes.”

After everything that's happened, Joyce would pay someone every dime of her paycheck just to promise that her life could be boring again. She sighed and stretched her leg out, her foot accidentally grazing the side of Hop’s leg.

“Hey mom, watch!” Will called over towards them. Joyce sat up a little straighter and turned around to watch Will dive off the side of the deep end, despite the no diving sign on the ground directly beneath his feet.

His head popped up from under the water and Joyce called, “Good job! Just be careful sweetie!”

“I know, I am,” Will promised.

Joyce sat on her knees facing the pool for a few minutes to supervise before realizing it would be much easier to sit on the other side of the hot tub to see him instead. She turned around and moved over to the opposite side. She found the closest jet she could, which placed her right next to Hopper, so close that as she settled in, Hopper felt her thigh against his hand under the water. She didn't seem to notice and so he tried not to immediately recoil.

This was just Joyce, he reminded himself, as he was here acting like he'd never touched a woman before. After a short time, Hopper grew a little too warm, so he pulled his arms from the water and stretched them out along the edge of the cool concrete.

"A little hot," Hop explained when Joyce glanced up at him.

"Mmm, it's perfect," Joyce smiled, shifting closer to him, her leg nearly fully pressed up against his.

It almost seemed like she *wanted* to be touching him. And, *Jesus*, had women's legs always been this soft, Hopper wondered. The two stayed in a comfortable quiet next to each other until Will eventually joined them too. Almost the second Will started walking over, Joyce repositioned herself, removing her leg from where it had rested against Hop's.

Okay, so she knew *exactly* what she was doing, Hopper confirmed.

The rest of the night went by surprisingly quick. They ordered a pizza for dinner, changed into their pajamas, and watched a little television. Will fell asleep in bed next to Joyce just before 10 pm.

The next day felt incredibly long and yet, somehow, it also seemed like no time at all before Joyce was back in the parking lot heading towards the car with Hopper, leaving Will inside without them.

When they arrived back in the car, Joyce put her head in her hands and let out a long, stressed sigh, that gave way to just how exhausted and worried she was.

"I really hate this."

"I know Joyce, I know." Hopper subconsciously mimicked her sigh.

He understood exactly what it was like to have to leave your frightened child at a hospital with only the anxious trust and hope that one of the doctors would be able to help them. “But he’s in good hands. And we’ll be just a phone call and a 10 minute drive away,” Hopper added in reminder.

Joyce nodded and sighed again. “Thanks again for coming with. I would *not* have been able to do this...” she trailed off.

The stress of navigating Chicago and holding together their backstory, while still trying to accurately convey Will’s symptoms would have all been a nearly impossible challenge without Hopper there. He had stepped up with confident answers to some of the questions when Joyce couldn’t, and he was just an overall calming presence, not just for her; she could tell Will benefited from having him there too. It’s as if Hopper provided a sort of buffer that made all of this seem a little less serious and scary.

Despite Joyce’s protesting, once they arrived back at the hotel, Hopper ordered them room service for dinner, including a bottle of wine, hoping it would help Joyce to relax at least a little. He knew there was a slim chance she would have been able to leave the phone long enough to go out to eat. He made sure to keep her glass topped off with wine as she anxiously sipped on it with their dinner.

Around 8:30, Will called their room to check in and tell Joyce goodnight which helped ease some of her nerves. When she hung up, Hopper proposed going down to the pool again for a little while.

“Come on, Joyce. It’ll be good for you. We can stop at the front desk and tell them if they get anymore phone calls for our room to come get us at the pool.”

Joyce gave Hopper a look, but he was right. They didn’t expect to be hearing from the doctors or Will again tonight unless something went very wrong. She was going to drive herself insane with worry the rest of the night anyway, so she might as well take the offer to maybe get her mind off things, at least for a little while.

“Okay, yeah. I suppose we can do that,” she finally agreed.

They changed into their still partially damp bathing suits, which was a rather unpleasant feeling, and made a quick stop at the front desk.

Down in the pool room, there were a few other people tonight, some kids swimming and one little girl in the hot tub with another couple. Being that the hot tub was partially occupied, her and Hopper slipped into a spot near the steps.

Thankfully, the bit of wine Joyce had consumed over dinner coupled with a few minutes of heat in the hot tub helped to quickly ease some of her anxiety again, or at least reduce it to the back of her mind instead of having it nearly consume her.

They stayed in the hot tub long enough that everyone else had left the pool for the night, and eventually the timer for the jets turned off.

A hot tub without the soothing whirling sound and bubbles was like sitting in a large bathtub, so Hopper moved to get up to turn them back on.

“I got it,” Joyce said, indicating for him to sit back down.

She climbed the steps to get out, and now that there was no one else here to catch him, Hopper took the opportunity to finally properly check her out while her back was turned. Joyce looked so sexy in a bathing suit, even better than he imagined, and yes, he’s imagined it.

“Oh my gosh, it’s freezing,” Joyce shivered immediately. What was once the hot and humid air in the room was now a stark contrast to the 104 degree heat of the water. She turned the knob on the wall and jogged back over, immediately easing herself down over the side next to Hopper, not bothering to walk back around to the steps.

“Mmm, that’s better,” she sighed, sinking down next to him.

Just like the day before, her leg brushed up against his, and there’s no mistaking that it was not an accident now. Instead of pulling away, he widened his legs slightly, pressing back against hers. In an attempt to pretend that this was nothing, Hopper took up a thorough studying of one of the fake plants near the wall, though he could feel Joyce’s eyes on him.

Jesus fucking Christ, man up, Jim, he told himself.

He gathered the courage and glanced over at her; the expression on her face was almost unreadable and dare he say, flirty, like she was challenging him to make the next move. He stared at her for a half a second, before realizing his face must have looked all sorts of confused, because Joyce just smiled and inched even closer. His eyes glanced down to her chest; he had the perfect view straight down her bathing suit now. Her soft, full, breasts rising and falling slightly with each breath. He imagined what it would be like to touch her, to leave a trail of kisses down her neck until his mouth met her breasts...

As if Joyce were reading his mind, her fingertips trailed over her chest, before slipping under the edge of her bathing suit to pull the strap up slightly in adjustment.

Shit, was he that obvious?

He quickly looked away again, not daring to see if she was looking at him, at least not until her heard a soft breathy moan of content come from her direction. He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye and saw that Joyce's eyes were closed. The hand that was just adjusting her bathing suit was now massaging the anxious tension from her neck. He'd love to take over that job too if she'd let him.

He took a breath and decided to test the waters, wondering exactly what Joyce was looking for in these little touches. Hopper's fingertips tentatively grazed her thigh, and when she didn't immediately pull back or shoot him a *what the hell are you doing* look, he settled his hand against her soft skin.

Friends could totally touch each other like this without it meaning anything more, right?

He spread his fingers wide over her thigh, his hand moving in long strokes up and down her leg, slightly encroaching closer and closer to her bikini line as he gained confidence.

"Hop," she murmured just barely loud enough for him to hear. He immediately recoiled, but her hand clasped tightly over his forearm, placing his hand right back to where it was.

“You don’t have to stop,” she whispered in his ear, so close that the wet ends of her hair tickled the skin of his exposed shoulder. “Please,” she added.

Despite the temperature in the hot tub and the rush of warmth Hopper felt throughout his body at her soft voice, goosebumps raised on his skin. Joyce kept hold of his forearm, her thumb absently rubbing back and forth in encouragement. Hopper wasn’t quite sure where he was headed with this in the first place. He didn’t want to take things too far and regret it later, but Joyce seemed to be enjoying it, so what harm could there be.

He slowly moved his hand back and forth over her right thigh, until he was so far in that his knuckles grazed her left leg too. Joyce spread her legs ever so slightly and her touch traveled down his arm until her fingers were on top of his. With little effort, she directed his hands between her legs, leaving them stranded on top of the smooth fabric of her bathing suit. Joyce turned her head and looked at him with a shy smile, not only giving him permission to touch her, but shifting slightly forward in encouragement.

Hoping he hadn’t forgotten how to do this given that it’d been 5 months since he’d been with a woman, and this wasn’t any woman, it was *Joyce*, he trailed his hand down over her bathing suit. His pinkie finger grazed her inner thigh as his hand traveled.

And then he felt Joyce’s hand on his thigh, slowly moving over his bathing suit until it landed on his crotch.

A million wild thoughts coursed through his head: *holy shit, is she going to notice how hard you already are, is it pathetic or would it turn her on, was this enough pressure for her, was it too much, too little? Should he kiss her? Where was this heading...*

In a completely strange turn of events, Joyce's mind was doing just the opposite. For once, she only felt an odd sense of calm that she wished could last forever. There was no worry, no anxiety, no thoughts, just Hop’s fingers pressing against her core, and his arousal under her hand.

They kept their hands over their bathing suits, as if both silently

agreeing that this was the most sexual contact they could have without it meaning anything serious. And since they were both rather touch starved, even through fabric, this felt insanely erotic. When his middle finger pressed just a bit harder against her, a slight sigh escaped Joyce's lips and her head rested up against his biceps. Hopper's hips ever so slightly moved in time with Joyce's slow strokes, her hand still over his bathing suit, yet finding it easy to grip him as the fabric clung to his skin in the water.

Joyce's eyes were closed, a look of such content blissfulness on her face that Hopper wished she could always have. He ditched the longer back and forth strokes, settling on slow circles with his middle finger once he realized that was what she seemed to need the most. He was instantly rewarded with a soft moan, her mouth parting slightly. Just hearing Joyce sent a jolt through his body and he suddenly realized he was in danger of completely losing control.

With Joyce.

In a public place.

Still clothed no less.

As if she could sense it, her grip on him tightened and her hand sped up. Hopper closed his eyes and dropped his head back, and then suddenly, there was a beep of a keycard in the door, and they heard voices. The sound startled them both enough that they stopped what they were doing at the same time and turned towards the door to see a family of 4 heading in. Joyce gave Hopper one last squeeze and turned back to him. Her chest pressed against his arm and she dropped her forehead to his shoulder, audibly exhaling with frustrated, disappointment.

This would be their luck, but *why now*, Hopper groaned internally.

30 more seconds. He just needed 30 more damn seconds with her.

Joyce looked up at him, shaking her head with a small laugh. Her hand settled back on his thigh, knowing she couldn't in good conscience continue to jerk him off in a room with two children and two adults who were now headed their direction. Hopper removed

his hand from her too and brought his arm up out of the water. Joyce slid closer and he wrapped an arm around her shoulder. She dropped her head to his chest and sighed. Sure, they could go back to their room and finish up, but for some reason, the idea of that mutually seemed completely off the table. Plus, Hop was going to need at least several minutes for his extremely obvious arousal to dissipate.

Having Joyce wrapped in his arm still felt pretty damn good. Taking one look at them, no one would have been able to guess that they were not in a relationship with each other. Another 20 minutes pass by quietly before Joyce starts to grow a little sleepy. She sat up a little straighter and stretched her legs to shake it off.

“You want to go?” Hop asked quietly.

“Are you...all good?” Joyce questioned in response, with a slight raise of her eyebrows.

“Yeah,” he smirked. “Yeah, I’m okay.”

“Okay,” she smiled softly, standing up.

They went back to their room that night, changed into pajamas, and just like the night before, but somehow feeling something a little more intimate, fell asleep in separate beds.

The next day went on as expected. Despite a few concerns in the backs of both of their minds, nothing seemed any different between them. They never once brought up what happened in the hot tub, but it also wasn’t like they were purposely avoiding the topic. It just didn't seem that important to talk about.

Joyce and Hop met with the doctor to discuss some of his findings. Will actually seemed to be enjoying his time at the facility. It wasn’t all just tests, poking and prodding, and questions like he had expected; they actually had an Atari with Space Dungeon and the brand new Crystal Castles game. Though still a challenge, seeing Will actually happy to be there throughout the day made leaving him for one more night a lot easier.

On the way back to the hotel, they stopped at the grocery store for

snacks and drinks at Joyce's suggestion, because she was not about to let Hopper order expensive room service for dinner again. For beverages, Hopper picked up a bottle of cranberry juice and a pint of vodka, knowing Joyce enjoyed this drink in particular. He put the liquor in a bucket of ice when they got back, and they snacked and flipped through the few television channels they had, finally settled on watching the news. Once the liquor was slightly cooled, Hopper got up and made a cocktail for Joyce.

Her eyes went wide watching him pour a rather close ratio of liquor to juice. He handed her the cup, and she took a cautious sip. The cranberry juice did little to mask the sheer volume of vodka, and she immediately made a face and wrinkled her nose, an involuntary shiver passing through her body.

"Hop! No," she said with a laugh, passing it back to him.

"Lightweight," Hopper smirked, pouring a second slightly less generous glass of vodka cran for her.

He took a sip of the original drink and tried to maintain his composure, because Joyce was eyeing him with a clear 'I told you so' look on her face.

"Okay, yeah. That's not great. But that's probably just because I'm more of a whiskey kind of guy, so-" he excused.

"Mm-hm. You trying to get me wasted tonight?" She laughed raising her eyebrows, almost in challenge.

"Maybe," Hopper shrugged. He did have his fair share of experience in numbing pain into non-existence, so if Joyce wanted to forget her problems for a night, he certainly was the right person to talk to. "Vacation, remember?" he smiled.

Joyce just rolled her eyes and picked up her glass. But he wasn't totally wrong. Today *had* been a much better day in terms of her anxiety. Everything seemed just as it should.

After Will called again to say goodnight, Hopper was already exiting the bathroom in his swimming trunks when she hung up.

“A bit presumptuous of you,” Joyce said.

“I didn’t say you had to come.”

Joyce narrowed her eyes at him and pushed past him into the bathroom to change her clothes anyway. She couldn’t turn down another night in the hot tub...even though the thought of what *could* happen tonight made her a little uneasy.

And excited.

To say she hadn’t thought about continuing on from where they were last night would be a lie. It’s probably partly why she so readily drank throughout the evening tonight. The alcohol certainly helped remove some of her own inhibitions.

When she came out of the bathroom in just her bathing suit, clutching her clothes in her hands, Hopper not so inconspicuously checked her out again. She pretended not to notice and threw on an oversized t-shirt, leaving her legs bare. For some reason, she had found a bit more confidence tonight, more than she would have even dreamed about having two nights ago.

Hopper handed Joyce a fully refilled glass.

“Might as well bring a refreshment.”

“I think they frown on drinking while in a hot tub,” Joyce said, narrowing her eyes at him, though she didn’t refuse the glass. She took a sip and noticed that either Hop watered this one down a bit for her, or she was already drunk enough to no longer taste the alcohol.

“I *think* the pool police aren’t going to mind,” he teased, being certain that no one really cared what they did as long as they didn’t make a mess.

Joyce just rolled her eyes and headed for the door.

Down at the pool, there were just two kids swimming, and the kids’ mom came down just before 9 and called them out.

Anytime there were kids around without a parent, Joyce felt the need to watch over them just in case. A motherly instinct that she didn't pick up in life until she had kids of her own. But once they left, she finally relaxed a bit. Hopper had his arm resting on the cement behind her. Joyce sank down into the warm water, leaning her head back against his arm, closing her eyes.

Hopper stole a glance at her, and when she didn't immediately open her eyes, he took the time to really study her features.

Joyce was so beautiful. Long, thick eyelashes...adorable, pink cheeks from the heat or maybe the liquor...perfectly kissable lips...What if he just leaned in and-

Joyce shifted and sighed, and Hopper immediately pulled back, his heart racing.

Nope. He probably should *not* do that.

However, Joyce didn't open her eyes, and inevitably, his gaze drifted down focusing on the slow rise and fall of her chest. It was almost mesmerizing just watching her breathe, so quiet and content. When Joyce realized she was nearing sleep, she opened her eyes and quickly sat up. She did not need to fall asleep here.

She also realized that she should not have even closed her eyes for so long or sat up as abruptly as she had, because now the room was spinning, and she felt a sudden rush of heat to her head. Hopper noticed the change in her demeanor almost immediately.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, it's just...I think I'm a little warm," she excused, climbing out to sit on the edge with just her feet in the water.

"It is pretty hot in here," Hopper agreed, climbing out as well. Joyce felt an odd sense of disappointment as he walked away.

Though she *was* too hot, she wasn't exactly ready to go back to their room just yet. But instead of heading for a towel, Hopper surprised her and jumped into the pool instead. He swam over to the edge, and called to her, "Much better over here!"

“It’s not cold?”

“Nope. Feels great.”

Joyce took a few deep breaths and once the room stopped spinning, she worked up the energy to stand up. She made her way over to the pool steps, and Hopper’s eyes followed her the whole way, immediately tanking any confidence she had earlier in the night.

When his eyes met hers, he smirked and raised his eyebrows; he’d been caught red-handed staring just a bit too hard this time.

“Okay, just relax,” she groaned, holding her hand up and shaking her head at him.

“What? You look nice in a bathing suit...”

Joyce quickly sat down on the steps, rubbing the cool water over her arms.

“Yeah right,” she denied, shaking her head again at his statement.

Had it not been for her now empty third, or was it fourth, glass of liquor, Joyce would have never called him out on that. On the flip side, Hop never would have dreamed about saying anything like that out loud to her either, even if it had always been the truth.

“You don’t think so?”

“No,” Joyce flat out admitted, swimming towards the middle of the pool now that she was used to the temperature change.

“Oh come on Joyce, you look incredible.”

Hopper turned around and swam a few strokes back and forth, noticing that it made her uncomfortable to talk about herself. That certainly wasn’t what he was aiming for.

“Me on the other hand, the years of beer and take out don’t exactly have me looking like I did back in my service days,” Hopper laughed turning the conversation towards himself instead.

“Yeah okay, and I’ve had two kids...”

“Yeah but Joyce, even if going through two pregnancies made you look any different, which you’re wrong if you think it did, that’s like, at least something amazing to be proud of. Your body grew two *children* inside it. Whereas, you know, I’m just someone who’s grown... incredibly lazy,” he commented.

“Oh, stop that,” Joyce swatted his arm, shaking her head at him.

“Okay so what, you uh, you like a middle aged man with a beer belly?” He teased, fully not expecting an answer.

Joyce glanced him up and down with the same intense gaze he had given her a few minutes ago and gave a little smile and shrug that sent Hopper absolutely spiraling.

“Oh please Joyce,” he immediately denied. “This is not the body of a man in any woman’s fantasy.”

“Hop, if you really believe that, then I think you don’t exactly understand what women want,” she replied, raising her eyebrows.

“You probably aren’t wrong there, but I feel pretty confident that *this*,” he stands up in the shallow end, and gestures to himself with both hands, “This isn’t it.”

“Then you would be wrong again.”

The way she replied with such confidence made Hopper shut up for a second. And then to his surprise, she went on.

“Listen, all I’m saying is that there are women who...” How should she put this without sounding like she’s throwing herself at him. “Who...are attracted to a certain strong, manly type, and you...you have those qualities, that’s all.”

Like he’s 12 years old, Hopper swam over to her and suddenly scooped her up in his arms.

“Strong like I could throw you halfway across this pool, strong?” He teased, prepared to do literally anything to escape this unexpected

turn in conversation.

“Hop!” Joyce exclaimed, trying to get out of his grasp, but he just tightened his grip and adjusted her in his arms like he was about ready to toss her. Her hands scrambled to wrap tightly around his neck. “JIM! I swear to god you better not!” Joyce shrieked in warning.

“Okay, okay, I won’t,” he agreed, though he didn’t let her go.

Joyce narrowed her eyes at him but relaxed her arms a bit, not fighting to get away anymore. And then in the next second, she was flying through the air and into the water. Joyce popped up from under the water and wiped her eyes, only to see Hopper with a smug grin on his face.

“You-“ She smirked, swimming back over to him. Even though he stood flat footed in water that was too deep for Joyce, she easily managed to push him up over to the side of the pool up against the wall. She gripped the edge of the pool in one hand and rested her foot on the other side of him, pinning him in place.

“*You are a jerk*,” she accused, playfully enunciating each word.

“Hmm, as I recall, that’s *not* exactly what you were saying a moment ago.”

“Yeah, well, I guess consider that just a temporary moment of insanity.”

Joyce had one leg still pressed up against Hopper’s strong thigh and didn’t immediately move.

“I don’t think it was, Joyce,” Hopper teased softly. “I *think* what we have established is that your type is middle-aged, overweight, jerks-“

“Experienced,” she interrupted him. “Strong, and *occasionally*, kind and compassionate men,” Joyce corrected quietly. Her eyes flashed to his and her body pressed up against him a bit harder.

“Okay...” Hop answered quietly. “And I like smart...beautiful,” he tucked a strand of wet hair behind her ear. “Incredibly tough,

women.”

His voice was low and soft, sending a flutter of something straight to Joyce’s core. No one had ever said anything like that to her before and genuinely meant it, not even her husband of many years. The closest she’d ever heard, was an ‘*Oh fuck, baby, you’re so hot,*’ while she laid under a man who was not even the slightest bit concerned about whether or not she was enjoying it.

“I see,” Joyce whispered. She wrapped one arm around his neck, her fingertips lightly grazing the skin just below his hairline. Hopper was practically frozen in place now. He knew what he *wanted* to do, and even with pretty blatantly clear signs of a mutual pining, he couldn’t manage to do it.

So when Hopper didn’t make the first move, Joyce did. She closed her eyes and pulled his face down slightly to hers, pressing her lips against his in what was actually a relatively quick kiss, though it felt like it went on for 5 hours given the range of emotions that flashed through Hop’s head in the short period of time.

Joyce pulled back and opened her eyes flashing a quick glance to his. Despite how dark her brown eyes were, her pupil dilation was unmistakable.

“Okay,” Hopper finally said, no louder than a whisper.

Joyce pulled back from him slightly and licked her lips, tasting nothing but chlorine.

“Sorry, I just-“ she began.

“No, don’t apologize,” he promised immediately. “I mean, if you want to do that again, I might be a little more prepared this time.”

Joyce threw a shy smile and took a breath, attempting to quiet the sudden thudding in her chest.

What the hell was she doing. She needed to stop this before it got carried away...

But instead of pulling away, she did the exact opposite and kissed

him again. Though he was not in any way, shape, or form, prepared like he'd said a moment ago, he could at least function enough to kiss her back this time. Joyce kept one foot pressed up against the wall and wrapped her other leg around him. Hopper nipped at her bottom lip and dropped one arm underneath her to lift her up just slightly, his fingertips curling into her soft flesh of her butt. Her pelvis rested just under his belly button; her breasts pressed up against his chest.

Joyce pulled away once more for air, a surprised sigh escaping her lips. It was a good thing they weren't still in the hot tub because if she thought she was hot before, her cheeks felt like they were actually on fire now.

God, was this the alcohol coursing through her veins, or did she *need* Hopper? And given the sudden, almost unbearable, ache flowing deep through her body, did she really care what the answer was?

Finally, Hopper got his shit together, and while he let Joyce breathe for a moment, he kissed her cheek softly, moving down to press gentle, yet insistent kisses along every inch of her jaw and over her neck, just like he'd imagined doing yesterday. The scruff of his beard left a trail of irritation on her already pink skin, though the bit of discomfort only seemed to further her arousal. Joyce let out another soft moan, echoing in the empty room.

This was the closest either of them had been to another person in many months, and that in itself, was intoxicating. If yesterday was good, this was fucking heaven.

Hopper's hand ran over her chest, his cock twitching against the fabric of his swimming trunks just at the feeling of her breasts in his hands.

Fuck, he's dreamed about touching her like this for SO long.

Reveling in the feeling of his hands on her body, Joyce let go of his neck for a second and yanked her bathing suit down to expose both of her breasts. She pressed back up against him, needing to feel his bare skin against hers. Hopper dropped his head back down to her neck, her head lolling to one side to give him access. His mouth traveled down to the swell of her breasts, placing a gentle kiss just

above her nipple, pleased at how it instantly hardened in response to his touch. Joyce moaned a little louder and they were both reminded about how they were currently in a very public place, with absolutely nothing preventing anyone from walking in again.

“Do you, uh, you want to go back to the room?” Hop asked.

Joyce immediately shook her head no. The thought of walking all the way back to their room and getting completely undressed in one of the beds where they would sleep tonight was too much, as if this had been planned or something. But here in the pool right now, she didn’t have to think about any of that. They could just keep going, and if this was a mistake, then it would be easier to rationalize that they were just a little bit buzzed and caught up in the moment, and that’s all.

“Do you want me to stop?” he asked instead.

Joyce pulled her pelvis back from him slightly, and he immediately dropped his arm from behind her, causing her to wrap her arm tighter around his shoulders. She dropped her other hand down to the front of his swim shorts and shook her head no.

Her hand ran back and forth over his still covered, but very obvious hard-on, and Hopper closed his eyes. A needy groan slipped out sending a wave of desire straight through Joyce’s entire body.

“Please don’t stop,” Joyce murmured into his ear for the second time in two days. She slid her hand between their bodies and slipped her fingers just inside the waistband of his bathing suit to stroke the skin of his lower abdomen, her knuckles occasionally brushing up against his throbbing and surely dripping, cock.

Hopper continued massaging her breast in his hands with the same soft touch she used on him until Joyce couldn’t take the tease much longer. She wrapped her hand firmly around him, giving him a few long, slow strokes.

“Mmm, Joyce,” Hopper exhaled, letting go of her for a moment to tilt her chin up for another passionate kiss. Slowly, but with purpose, Joyce slid her hand up and down his length. She tilted her pelvis up

slightly to grind against her perfectly placed forearm.

With his brain basically short circuiting, it took Hopper a few moments longer than he'd care to admit to realize that he had permission to touch more than just her breasts now. Hopper snaked the hand that had been holding her up underneath her to rub her instead. With his support gone, Joyce re-wrapped her leg around him a little tighter and reached for the cool metal of the pool ladder next to them to anchor herself with her free hand. Hopper didn't waste much time today, his fingers finding their way under the fabric of her bathing suit quickly.

Soon, the only sounds in the empty pool room were the quiet echoes of their sharp pants and the soft splashing of the water as they worked to pleasure each other.

Hopper's fingers rubbed her with the perfect amount of pressure, but it was as if Joyce couldn't get close enough to him with both of their hands pressed between each other's bodies like this.

"Jim," she moaned softly, removing her hand from him for a moment, her fingernails slowly stroking the back of his neck.

He immediately feared that she finally realized what they were doing and *how they shouldn't be doing it*, but instead, she let go of the ladder with her other hand and pulled his swim trunks down slightly so that his cock was free. Joyce's brow furrowed in desperate need and Hopper's mimicked hers, almost in a state of his own disbelief.

She rearranged the bottom of her bathing suit, yanking the crotch to one side. A two piece bathing suit certainly would have made this a bit more convenient. It wasn't like she could just slip back into a one piece suit inconspicuously if she were to remove it and someone were to walk in, so this would have to do.

Joyce took him in her hand once more and lowered herself slightly, until the head of his cock was pressing against her.

"Joyce..." he exhaled in question, though there was very little doubt what she wanted, he needed to be absolutely sure.

“Just pull out, okay?”

“Yeah,” Hop nodded. “Of course.”

At this point in the night, he was sure he was about to wake up back home alone in his bed with his underwear soaking wet, like he was a teenager again.

But as Joyce guided him inside her, the sensation of her warmth gripping him tightly was so intense he knew there was no way this was a dream.

Joyce held on to his shoulder with one hand and gripped the edge of the pool with her other. Her mouth parted, emitting almost involuntary little whimpers as she slowly lowered herself on him, needing a moment to adjust to the slight burn of his girth. Her thighs squeezed his hips, and her heels dug into the back of his strong thighs. Relief and even more desire ripped through both of their bodies when Joyce started slowly grinding him. As hard as she had tried to be quiet, a rather loud moan escaped her mouth causing Hopper to grin. Had anyone been walking by the door, they surely would have heard her. And it was a rather unmistakable sound at that.

But fuck, she couldn't help it; it felt so good to finally feel a bit of relief from the incessant pressure between her legs that's plagued her since last night.

Joyce brought her mouth to his in attempt to smother some of the sounds coming from her. She felt every soft, breathy grunt from Hop now too, which only fueled her need even more.

Hopper glanced down at her perfect breasts that had been freed from her bathing suit, bouncing ever so slightly as she grinded on him. She was absolutely beautiful, and he couldn't manage to look down at her for long without feeling like he was too close to coming.

As Joyce's hips sped up, her fingertips dug tighter against his neck, trying to maintain her grip on him. He had it easy being able to stand on the bottom of the pool, but she was so tiny that even if she stood up here, she wouldn't have been able to touch the ground where they

stood without being underwater. He was so lost in the moment that it didn't even occur to him to move to a slightly shallower spot.

Hopper slipped his free hand between them to find her clit, beginning with slow and deliberate strokes, until Joyce's thrusts against him grew a bit more erratic. He moved in time with her, speeding up until her breathing was ragged and fragmented. Joyce re-wrapped her legs around him for a tighter grip, and Hopper took a second to rearrange his grip on her too, tucking a hand under her ass to hold her in place. She was practically weightless in the water as it was.

"It's okay, I got you Joyce, I got you," Hopper promised softly in her ear.

And thank god he had her, because those words and the slight tremble in his voice when he said it sent a massive swarm of feelings to her gut that terrified her and would have surely sank her to the bottom of the pool otherwise.

Joyce let up her grip on the edge of the pool and wrapped both arms around his neck, taking the opportunity to grind against him in a spot where her clit perfectly aligned with his pelvic bone.

Hop let out a noise, something between a groan, and a husky, throaty sound that resembled her name, and Joyce clung to him even tighter. She dropped her forehead to the crook of his neck and engulfed a fistful of hair in her hand. Her hips stilled, letting him take over fucking her at whatever pace he wanted. She was moments away from orgasm no matter what happened in the next 30 seconds.

"Oh god, Jim, please," she whimpered in his ear.

Joyce's hand clawed at whatever skin it could find, her toes curling with such a built up tension that she started trembling before her orgasm even hit her. Her eyes pressed closed, and her breathing came out in nearly silent, gasping whines.

Hopper was so close too, in fact too close to maintain anything but a short, hard thrusting pace. Suddenly Joyce's gasps stopped for a second, and she held her breath. Her entire body tensed against his until he felt her teeth sink into his shoulder in a silent scream. She

clenched down his cock so tight it felt like she was going to squeeze him right out. He tried to make it through her whole orgasm, but his heart started pounding and he knew he was past the point of no return when he felt the rising sensation moving through him. Hopper abruptly pulled out as promised, and a second later, he was ejaculating into the water with a satisfied, breathless groan and what was certainly the best orgasm he's had in years, or perhaps ever.

Hopper let out a heavy exhale, and they both focused on catching their breath for a moment. Joyce still had her legs wrapped around him, her foot absently stroking his thigh, while she rested with her head tucked against his neck.

"Wow. Imagine if someone had walked in on us *tonight*," Hop finally said.

"I still would have jumped off you so quick," Joyce told him honestly with a laugh. And then her cute little smile suddenly turned serious. "Oh my god, Hopper!"

"What," he asked immediately, concerned that she was already regretting this.

Joyce pulled her eyebrows together looking at him in disbelief. "I bit you," she frowned in surprise, as if she had blacked out when it had happened.

"Oh," he laughed, relieved that that was all she meant.

"I am so sorry," she immediately apologized, embarrassed to have left a literal mark on him. "I have never done that before...I- I was just trying to keep quiet." She pressed a kiss to his reddened, indented skin.

"Nothing to be sorry for. It's kind of hot," he admitted, despite Joyce's horrified look.

As if also just remembering that her breasts were still out, she looked down and quickly pulled her bathing suit back up.

"You really didn't have to do that."

Joyce just smirked and shook her head at him and continued to fix her top half.

“Do you ever wonder how many other people have had sex in this pool?”

The question was so out of nowhere that Joyce couldn't help but giggle.

“I mean, no. No, I didn't wonder that until just now.”

“Well, you're welcome for that. And I know, I know. I'm romantic as hell,” he shook his head at how stupid he could be sometimes. “Guess that's why I've got the ladies back home lined up around the block,” he joked because he knew, and he *thought* she knew too, that there was absolutely no one else, and there never would be anyone else as long as she was in his life.

Joyce laughed because that was the correct response, but the understanding that it didn't have to be a joke if he didn't want it to be, hurt a lot more she would care to admit.

Eventually, the two spent a few minutes in the hot tub again, and then headed back up to their room.

“Seeing as how my hair somehow has gotten soaked in chlorine, I'm just going to take a quick shower,” Joyce said, with a smile.

“Hmm, not sure how that happened,” Hop grinned at her, as she headed towards the bathroom.

Hopper waited until he heard the shower start up, and then he picked up the phone. He called down to the front desk to set up a wake-up call for them for the morning and then made one more phone call.

I'll call you twice in a row and hang up. On the third time, you can pick up and you'll know it's me, got it? Hopper had promised El before he left. *Like our secret knock, but for a phone call instead.*

He did just as he promised, and on the third phone call, it rang once and then the other end of the line was silent.

“Hey kid, it’s me, you there?”

“Hi,” El’s little voice answered, sounding relieved. She’d never talked on a telephone before, and she wasn’t sure if Hopper was going to call her at all.

“Hey, how’s everything going?” He asked.

“It’s good,” El answered simply.

“Good, that’s good. You ate dinner, right?”

“Yes.”

“Yeah? What did you have?”

“A sandwich,” El told him.

“A sandwich, okay good. That’s actually a good dinner.” Even though these past few days have been nothing short of amazing, it was a strange to hear her voice and to suddenly realize how much he missed her.

“Mmhm,” El agreed, leaving out how it was a waffles and whipped cream sandwich. It didn’t count as a lie if she just didn’t mention that part, right?

“What time did you go to bed last night?”

Uh-oh. That was one question she couldn’t think of a quick answer for.

“Maybe a little bit past bedtime,” she admitted.

“A little bit?”

El giggled. Hopper glanced at the clock, just now realizing that it was nearing 10:30, so it was almost 11:30 back in Hawkins. He probably should have thought about that before calling her, though obviously he hadn’t woken her up.

“Okay, well tonight I want you in bed by midnight at the latest, got

it?"

"Yes," El answered sadly, as if Hop would somehow know if she stayed up too late again.

"Promise?"

El hesitated before answering, "Yes, I promise." There was a short silence and then El said, "I miss you."

Hopper sighed. "I miss you too. But I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay."

"Well, I'll let you go. Goodnight," Hop told her, hanging up. He put the receiver down and laid down on his bed, realizing this was the happiest he'd felt in years. El was good. Joyce was good, at least for tonight, and everything was just as it was meant to be.

Except inside the bathroom, unbeknownst to Hopper, Joyce had caught the tail end of his phone conversation. She'd heard him talking, and though she was pretty sure she hadn't heard the phone ring, she hopped out of the shower, not even turning it off, ready for the worst news that something happened with Will. But then she heard, 'I miss you too...I'll see you tomorrow...'

Stupid. How could she be such a fool?

It had been a challenge to hear what he was saying with the water running, but she knew she heard that part clear as day. 'I'll see you tomorrow...' as if everything were normal. As if these past two nights meant nothing to him.

She'd been so stupid to think that she'd been any different than any of the other women back home who thought they could fix Jim Hopper. She was no different than whatever young blonde he had waiting back at his place who also fell for those soft murmurs that made you feel like you were his whole world, and those fucking mesmerizing, talented, fingers that could make you forget everything shitty in your life for just a few minutes.

Thirty minutes ago, she wasn't sure where their relationship stood,

but she certainly thought this had all at least meant *something* to him. Joyce felt like she'd been punched in the gut and leaned back against the wall, literally gasping for air now. She never should have let him this far into her life. She knew better.

And then she wondered if maybe this had all surprised him too. Maybe he was going to go home and let the other girl go. Maybe he would tell her the truth if she just asked. Joyce climbed back in the shower to finish rinsing her hair and did her best to collect herself. She got dressed and took a deep breath, exiting the bathroom.

Hopper was laying on his bed in just his pajama pants, flipping through the television channels.

"Everything okay?" Joyce asked nonchalantly, running a towel through the ends of her wet hair.

"What?" Hopper asked.

"Oh, I just thought I heard you talking to someone on the phone."

"Oh, um, yeah, yeah...I uh, I was just calling down to the front desk to set a wake-up call." Just like El, it wasn't a total lie. He *had* called the front desk before calling El.

"Oh, okay," Joyce nodded and that immediately settled that.

Hopper flat out lied to her. Why else would he do that unless it was some other girl that he didn't want her to know about.

This confirmed that Hop was no different than her ex.

Why was she so hellbent on being attracted to men who would only ever lead her into a disaster of a relationship? Confirming that it was as bad as she had expected hurt more than she ever thought possible. She could not, *she would not*, allow herself to get into another destructive relationship like that ever again, no matter how safe and loved he'd made her feel less than an hour ago.

Joyce went back into the bathroom and hung up her wet towel. She wiped the tears from her cheeks that suddenly wouldn't stop, and quickly returned back to her own bed. She kept her back turned on

Hopper and spent a few moments fixing the blankets on her bed, hoping he wouldn't notice that she was crying.

And he didn't notice, at least, not right away. In fact, Hopper had been sort of waiting to see if she was going to join him in his bed tonight. He thought it was pretty obvious that he would have been okay with it. And not only okay with it, but that he *wanted* her to.

So when Joyce pulled the blankets back on the other bed, he felt a small crush of disappointment. If sleeping together was something Joyce wanted to do, she would have done it, so he tried to drop the idea from his mind.

Joyce laid down in her bed, facing away from him. He thought it was a bit strange that she wasn't even watching tv, though it was nearing 11 pm, and they did have to wake up pretty early the next morning.

"You uh, you want the tv off?" Hopper asked.

She didn't respond and he wondered if she was already asleep.

"Joyce?" he asked softly.

"Oh uh, no. Do whatever you want," she finally said, not turning back towards him.

Okay, something definitely seemed off now.

"Yeah, I guess I'm pretty tired too. I mean, I suppose having the hottest sex of your life will really take it out of you," he laughed, eyeing her, expecting to at least get a famous Joyce Byers eye roll out of her. But there was nothing.

So Hopper turned the television off and the only sound in the room was the soft humming of the heater.

Maybe she should have told him to keep the tv on. That would have made it easier to cover up her occasional sniffles. Except that would have required speaking to him again and that was not an option at this second. Tears freely dripped down her cheeks, and she pressed her eyes closed, forcing herself to take deep breaths in and out of her mouth.

The bedside light turned off and being engulfed in darkness made her feel slightly better. At the least, he wouldn't be able to see her red, puffy eyes, or the look on her face that surely gave way just how her heart felt like it was shattering into a hundred pieces.

"6:30 tomorrow morning, right?" Hopper asked, shifting around in his bed.

"Mmhm," she managed to answer.

"Okay, well...goodnight Joyce."

"Night," she answered.

Hopper wasn't always in tune with what women were feeling, but for some reason, it always seemed like he had this intuition with Joyce. And now his intuition was telling him something was very wrong. His eyes adjusted to the dark, and after a few minutes of staring at her back, he was positive that she was crying.

Joyce had been so focused on trying not to make a sound that she didn't hear him climb out of bed, not until his hand touched her shoulder.

"Hey," he questioned, his voice soft with an obvious edge of concern.

Damn him.

He was *not* allowed to use that tone with her anymore. It was too heavy, it carried too much weight, too much history with it.

Joyce tried to swallow the thick lump in her throat.

She was feeling so much in this second and there was so much she wanted to say.

She was devastated, she was *pissed*, she wanted to scream at him, she wanted to know why he felt the need to make her fall for him just to take it all back, she wanted to know why he lied to her, she wanted to know who the other woman was. She deserved to know, didn't she?

Except when images of these past two days flashed through her mind, *she* was the one who told him to keep touching her yesterday. *She* was the one who kissed him first today. *She* was the one who asked him to fuck her. What was he going to say? No thanks, I'm not really interested in having sex.

Fuck.

She was the one making a complete fool of herself. He was just being who he's always been, and none of this should have been a surprise. Jim Hopper didn't have more than a one or two night stand with a woman.

That was maybe the most comforting thought to her. Whatever pretty, young thing he had waiting back at his place for him was no different than her either, she wasn't special. She'd get her heart ripped out of her chest one of these days too.

So instead of shouting at him, Joyce wiped her tears and tried to respond as collected as she could.

"Yeah?" She finally answered, her voice was no louder than a whisper.

Hop knew it was stupid to ask her if she was okay. She was crying and clearly trying to hide it so obviously she wasn't alright.

He wanted nothing more than to wrap her up in his arms and make her whole, to make her feel safe. To make her know that he would do *anything* for her.

Joyce felt the bed shift under his weight, and then he was under the sheet behind her.

No. Goddamn him, no!

Lying to her was one thing. But he was not allowed to do... all of *this*. How could he wrap her up in his arms and pretend like everything was okay? Like she actually *meant* something to him?

Joyce was trembling ever so slightly, and Hopper wasn't sure if it was because she was that upset or because she was cold. That is, until her

foot grazed his leg.

“Jesus, Joyce. You should have said something, you’re freezing,” he commented.

Was she? She hadn’t noticed.

He climbed back out of bed to adjust the room temperature, as if warming her up would maybe fix whatever was going on right now.

After he got up, Joyce realized if she couldn’t manage to ask him about any of this, then at the least, she needed to ask him to go back to his own bed tonight.

But suddenly here he was again back under the covers with her, collecting her wet hair off the back of her neck and carefully tucking the blankets around her to make sure that she warmed up.

He laid behind her again and wrapped his arm over the top of her, holding her close.

Eventually Hopper knew he had to ask.

“Um, Joyce...just...it’s not over anything that happened tonight or anything, is it?”

He needed to know now before he felt something for her that he wouldn’t be able to just pack away when they got back home, he wouldn’t be able to pretend that all of this was nothing. Although that was stupid; no matter what she responded, it was already far too late for him to just forget about any of this.

His heart rate rose, and his breathing sped up waiting for what felt like forever for her to answer.

But then finally, a shake of her head, *no*.

Of course it wasn’t, he sighed softly in relief.

Joyce has all this other shit happening in her life, it’s not like having sex with him one time had fixed any of that.

“Well, um, if you want to talk about anything, you know I’m here. Any time, day or night,” he promised, softly pulling her just a little bit closer.

Joyce bit down hard on her lip to keep from sobbing.

How could he lie here in bed with her and say any of this like he meant it, like he actually gave a damn about her?

Hopper softly stroked her arm and pressed a kiss to the back of her head.

Obviously, she wasn’t interested in talking about whatever was bothering her right now, so instead, he just held her close, hoping that she knew that she would never have to go through any of this alone ever again.

Eventually, the two fell asleep together in bed, lost in two totally separate worlds.